

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Auto-guidance isn't auto-safety
- Beat the peak
- Enter photo contest



While fields are smaller at the Answer Plot® Innovation Farm between Washburn and Wilton, it still takes a wide array of farm equipment to produce crops and conduct research.

Innovation comes together near Washburn

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

The Missouri River held major significance through centuries of history, even before the United States formed 250 years ago.

The Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara grew crops and hunted along its shores. It was where other tribal nations gathered and bartered goods and food.

The river provided major transportation, delivering staples to pioneering homesteaders who claimed their stake in the fresh, fertile soil to begin farming and building new lives.

Today, the unique aspects of the Missouri River corridor between Washburn and Wilton deliver the Answer Plot® Innovation Farm to the modern

generations of farmers that followed in their footsteps.

The 162-acre Answer Plot Innovation Farm, owned by WinField United, is a research and demonstration site for North Dakota-grown crops, and production and management techniques.

WinField United is one of the Land O'Lakes core businesses, described Todd Coulter, Answer Plot regional manager. Land O'Lakes is a farmer- and agricultural retailer-owned cooperative founded in 1921, he described. It provides seed, crop protection products, and agronomic services and insights, working with local networks of agricultural retailers and producers.

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The Answer Plot® Innovation Farm sign greets travelers along Highway 1804 south of Washburn.

WinField United has several other smaller Answer Plot locations in North Dakota and the region, but the Washburn facility is its main Innovation Farm in the state. It's part of a national Answer Plot program providing local, grassroots information and services to producers to meet their localized needs, said Coulter, who is located in central Iowa.

The broader North Dakota program through its satellite Answer Plot locations also includes seed variety advancements and comparisons, foliar and agronomic evaluations, and screenings such as herbicide tolerance. The emphasis is on the ability to provide data-based insight for producers, Coulter explained.

The same significance that drew people to the region centuries ago drew the contemporary people of WinField United to the Washburn site. It fit logistically and agronomically. It's easily accessible near the junction of Highway 83 and Highway 1804. It's less than 50 miles from Bismarck. The Highway 200 bridge at Washburn also connects the Answer Plot Innovation Farm with producers west of the Missouri River.

McLean Electric Cooperative already provided nearby electrical service, which is an example of one member-owned cooperative serving another cooperative.

Plus, there was potential for rural water access.

But above all, the soil and river drew WinField United to purchase the acreage, just as the river and soils drew century-old residents and early homesteaders.

It has lighter soil types, uniform fields and its yields are typically uniform.

"The proximity to the Missouri River also made it well suited for wheat response to population work across high and low seeding populations," Coulter added, which

is also part of the research conducted at the facility.

So, it's nearly ideal as an agricultural demonstration, training and research site that produces local field-tested insights on diversified crops and management practices in North Dakota.

"The location along the river mimics the environment and soils, both east and west river," Coulter said.

The Washburn site focuses on the diversified crops important to producers across the Northern Great Plains, which includes hard red spring and winter wheat, spring and winter canola, field peas, sunflowers, milo, alfalfa, chickpeas, lentils and forage sorghum.

Basically, if it's grown in the area, it's grown at the Washburn Answer Plot Innovation Farm. The farm also has demonstration plots with corn and soybeans in at least one program year, Coulter described.

The facility's staff includes Research Manager Matt Ferderer and agricultural specialists Nicolas Leo and Kendra Steckler. They incorporate a 360-degree crop management approach to pair product selection (seed, crop protection and nutrition) with localized in-season management insights through structured field trials and research on seed response. For example, they look at how a certain seed responds to nutrients, seeding rates and fungicide timing, Coulter explained. The result is information that helps guide producers through an entire growing season, not just planting, he added.

The trials were created, in part, because many producers are seeking additional crop options, Coulter continued. That's part of an ongoing trend toward diversification where markets and agronomics fit. There is also increasing interest in "new-to-the-area" crops.

Innovation and knowledge are core to the future success of business, industry and agriculture, Coulter continued.

"We are continually adapting and updating trials building on the future," he added.

In addition to the Washburn Answer Plot Innovation Farm, the staff also conducts research at nine satellite Answer Plot sites in North Dakota.

Protocol implemented at each Answer Plot location allows for precision timing of agricultural practices, such as planting, fertility, scouting, in-season treatments, crop protection and harvest, which provides reliable data for producers to base their management decisions, Coulter explained. Essentially, it's hands-on, in-the-field research.

The Answer Plot Innovation Farm began its first full year of diversified crop research in 2023, hosting its first farm tour in August 2023. Since then, it's become an annual event, drawing hundreds of producers and agricultural retailers from throughout the country.

The annual tour is an in-field learning and networking opportunity, plus a chance to ask questions from the researchers conducting the programs.

Based on the trials and demonstrations, Coulter said



WinField United, one of the Land O'Lakes core businesses, provides local research and demonstrations helping area agricultural producers find answers to their crop production questions and concerns.

the tour helps address an array of producer questions, such as what varieties or hybrids perform best locally. Seeding rates, nitrogen and sulfur management – especially for wheat – fungicide timing and its rate of investment is other information shared. Other details include canola shatter risk, fit and profitability of diversified crops, such as field peas, sunflower, canola and wheat, in a producer's local rotation or management changes that could be necessary to reduce risk when a new crop is added to a rotation. It's all increasingly important information given rising production costs.

The 2026 Answer Plot Innovation Farm LIVE event is July 29 beginning at 10 a.m. with lunch served at the farm's location about one-half mile from the Highway

83 and Highway 1804 junction. Preregistration is recommended and is available through local WinField United retailers.

With many North Dakota farms covering large acreages, the research, information and data provided through the Answer Plot Innovation Farm serves hundreds of thousands of acres across the region, Coulter added.

For centuries, the Missouri River, its wooded bottomlands, and rolling hills and plains shaped McLean County and the surrounding region years ago. A 162-acre Answer Plot Innovation Farm continues to shape the present as well as the future for agriculture. ■

KX/Co-op Day **at the North Dakota State Fair**

Wednesday, July 22
10 a.m. to 3 p.m. CT

Stop by for free breakfast, prizes, cash drawings and an ice cream social. Stop by our office for coupons to save on gate and rodeo admission, rides and more!



AUTO-GUIDANCE **ISN'T AUTO-SAFETY**

Today's farming technology makes fieldwork more efficient than ever—but even with GPS and auto-steering, **your attention still matters.**

North Dakota electric cooperatives have seen an increase in accidents involving farm equipment hitting power poles and electrical infrastructure—**often because operators rely too heavily on auto-guidance systems.**



STAY ALERT. STAY SAFE.

No matter how advanced your equipment is, always keep these safety tips in mind:



Keep at least **10 feet** between equipment and power lines.



Watch for tall machinery like sprayers and cultivators.



Know the location of overhead lines before heading into the field.



Be cautious with new or larger equipment that may not clear lines.



Never attempt to move or fix power lines or guy wires yourself.

Technology is a powerful tool—**but it doesn't replace awareness.**

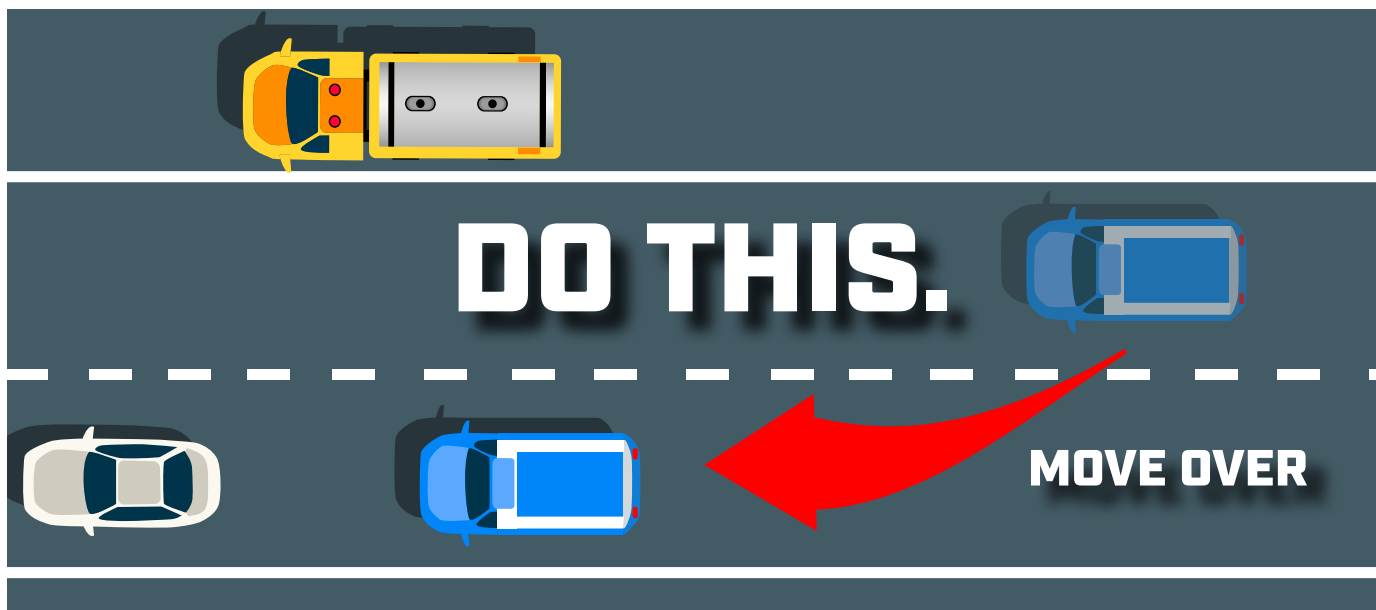


Let's keep this season **productive** and **safe.**



#FarmSafety #StayAlert #RuralSafety #ElectricSafety #NDFarmers

SEE THESE?



Move over. Protect roadside workers.

If your car has ever broken down or had a flat tire, leaving you stranded on the side of a road, you know how dangerous and unnerving it can be. Cars and trucks speeding by just inches away leaves too little margin for error and could so easily result in a disastrous crash.

America's first responders – police, firefighters and ambulance crews – face this peril every day in the line of duty. Also at risk are tow truck drivers, highway workers, utility workers and others whose jobs sometimes require they park their vehicle on the roadway or the side of the road.

North Dakota's electric cooperatives are committed to the safety of our employees and member-consumers, and encourage motorists to move over or slow down (preferably both) when approaching utility vehicles on the side of the road with flashing lights activated.

Please give our employees the room they need to work safely; their jobs are dangerous enough already.

The North Dakota Move Over Law states if an authorized emergency vehicle is parked or stopped on the interstate system or on a multi-lane highway outside

the limits of a city, and the authorized emergency vehicle is displaying a flashing, revolving or rotating amber, blue, white or red light, the driver of an approaching vehicle shall proceed with caution and move to a lane that is not adjacent to the authorized emergency vehicle if the move may be made safely. If the driver cannot move over, the driver must reduce speed and maintain a safe speed for road conditions.

The law has also been expanded to include moving over for any stopped motor vehicle with flashing hazard warning signals when stopped along the interstate system or on a multi-lane highway outside the limits of a city.

Every driver has a part to play in keeping utility workers, first responders and others safe. When you see a vehicle with flashing lights, please slow down, move over and give them space to stay safe. "Move over" is not only the law in all 50 states, but is also the courteous thing to do. And when you safely move over, you are signaling to the drivers behind you they should follow your lead. ■

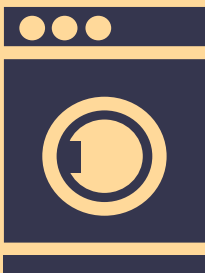


BEAT THE PEAK

Did you know electricity costs more during peak hours of usage? That's why we encourage members to use less electricity during peak demand hours from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m.

If you can lower your use of electricity during these peak hours, you can help your electric cooperative keep rates stable.

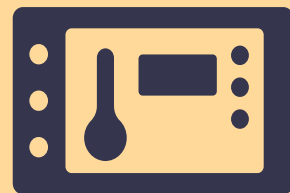
DURING SUMMER PEAK HOURS:



Do laundry during the day or later at night.



Avoid using the dishwasher or other major appliances during these hours.



Turn up the thermostat by 2 to 5 degrees.

WITH YOUR HELP, WE CAN ALL "BEAT THE PEAK!"



Get your camera ready

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

It's time to plan for the glorious days of summer and the coming year. Spending time at one's favorite McLean County lake. Family gatherings and the wonders of the outdoors. Softball, baseball and T-ball. Swimming and kayaking or just playing in the yard with the dog. Feeding chickens, fishing, farming, football and fall hunting seasons. Watching wildlife or sunrises and sunsets or simply living life as rural McLean County residents.

It's also time to think about entering McLean Electric Cooperative's (MEC) second annual photo contest.

From babies to families, critters of an array of sizes and shapes, and time on the water, MEC member-owners can put our life in rural McLean County on grand display and win prizes in the process.

The photographer of our grand prize-winning photo will receive a \$50 MEC bill credit and \$50 Visa gift card (\$100 total value).

First-place winners in each category receive a \$25 MEC bill credit and \$25 Visa gift card (\$50 total value).

The grand prize winner, along with first place and honorable mention winners, will also have their photos published in upcoming 2027 MEC local pages of *North Dakota Living*.

CATEGORIES:

- **Family and Friends Make Life Great:** Celebrate McLean County residents through portraiture or play in McLean County.
- **Hats off to Work:** MEC member-owners or family members at work, whether in the agriculture or energy industry, business world or self-employed.
- **Our Great Outdoors – Furry, Feathered, Flora and Fauna:** Let's celebrate what makes McLean County an outdoor destination – its lakes of all sizes, Missouri River, wildlife of all shapes and sizes, flora, fauna and

its natural scenic beauty.

CONTEST RULES:

- Photos must be taken by MEC member-owners or a parent/guardian must be a MEC member-owner for photographers 18 years of age and younger.
- Original digital photos only.
- No AI or photoshopping, although photos can be adjusted for color, exposure and cropping. Remember color and exposure vary depending on computer monitor settings.
- One entry per category per person.
- File type: high-resolution jpg, jpeg or png.
- All photos must be taken in 2026.
- Winners will be announced in the February 2027 issue of MEC's Local Pages of *North Dakota Living*.

ENTRY SUBMISSIONS:

- Include name, contact number and email address along with photo location and date it was taken.
- **Deadline: Dec. 1.**
- Submit all entries to MECphotocontest@mcleanelectric.com. ■

Questions:

**Contact MEC Communications Manager
Sonja Moe at**

**701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922 or email
MECphotocontest@mcleanelectric.com.**

McLean County community calendar: Events and activities to see and do

McLean County area food pantry July distribution and donation thrift store dates, times and locations:

- **Garrison – Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry:** Noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. July 23.
- **Makoti, Parshall, Plaza, Roseglen, Ryder, White Shield and others in need – Community Food Pantry:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. July 25, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti. Community Thrift Store hours: 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, 4-7 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, except holidays, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Max – Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry:** Noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. July 20, Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **Turtle Lake – The Lord's Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. July 9 and 10 a.m.-noon July 25, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Turtle Lake – Free Community Clothing Share & Exchange Store:** Noon-6 p.m. every Thursday, 221 Main St.
- **Underwood – Community Cupboard of Underwood food distribution:** 10 a.m.-noon July 16, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like on Facebook (Community Cupboard of Underwood) for distribution dates and thrift store updates.
- **Underwood – Community Cupboard of Underwood Thrift Store:** 1-5 p.m. every Tuesday.
- **Washburn – McLean Family Resource Center:** McLean County residents can contact the center, 701-462-8643, for an appointment to pick up baskets along with more information or assistance through the center's services, 205 Seventh St.
- **Washburn – McLean Family Resource Center Clothing Outlet:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 205 Seventh St.
- **Wilton – Wilton Food Pantry mini distributions:** 11:30 a.m. until gone every Friday. Full food distribution 4-6 p.m. July 16, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.
- **Wilton – The (free) Clothes Closet:** 3-5 p.m. July 16, First Presbyterian Church, 401 Dakota Ave.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, vegetables, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, macaroni and cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup, pasta, spaghetti, Alfredo and pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups and chili, and household items, such as body wash and soap, dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Contact local food pantries for drop-off locations, information or a list of additional needs in your community.

July and early August events:

Be sure to check out area special events celebrating the 250th anniversary of the United States.

- **July 3:** McLean Electric Cooperative closed in observance of the Fourth of July holiday.
- **July 10-12:** Annual Arikara Celebration Powwow and White Shield Stampede Rodeo, White Shield.
- **July 10-12:** Turtle Days featuring the band Tripwire for the July 11 Saturday night street dance, Turtle Lake.
- **July 11-13:** Threshing Show, Makoti.
- **July 17-18:** North Dakota Governor's Cup Walleye Derby. Boats launch from Fort Stevenson State Park beginning each day at 7 a.m. Contact the park at 701-337-5576 for details. Daily entrance or annual pass admission fee. Weigh-in each afternoon beginning at 3 p.m., Garrison City Park, Garrison.
- **July 18:** North Dakota Junior Governor's Cup, Fort Stevenson State Park, 10 a.m., Garrison. Contact the park at 701-337-5576 for details. Daily entrance or annual pass admission fee.
- **July 19:** Kids Night, 6 p.m. McLean County Speedway, Underwood.
- **July 28:** Christmas in July, sponsored by the Dickens Village Festival, Garrison.
- **July 29:** WinField United Innovation Farm and Answer Plot® tour, bringing agricultural producers and sellers together to learn the latest local, field-tested diversified crop and management information, 10 a.m. -2:30 p.m. with lunch provided, south of Washburn on Highway 1804.
- **July 31 and Aug. 1:** Max Rodeo Association Annual Roughrider Rodeo.
- **Aug. 1:** Clint Hill Memorial Dedication, Veterans Memorial Park, Main Ave., Washburn, featuring the 188th Army Band, local soloists and speakers with a dinner to follow at the Washburn Memorial Hall with the Victor B. Wallin American Legion Post No. 12 hosting the event.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County can contact Patricia Stockdill at stockdill.patricia@gmail.com or 701-337-5462 to submit community events. ■

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